

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 2319

As Passed House:
February 12, 2004

Title: An act relating to traffic control signal preemption devices.

Brief Description: Regulating traffic signal preemption devices.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Representatives Wallace, Armstrong, Murray, Campbell, Wood, Jarrett, Morrell, Lovick, Cooper, Sullivan, Kenney, Condotta, Chase and Edwards).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 2/2/04, 2/4/04 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/12/04, 96-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Defines traffic control signal preemption device and makes selling, owning, or using such a device a gross misdemeanor, except as authorized.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 29 members: Representatives Murray, Chair; Rockefeller, Vice Chair; Simpson, G., Vice Chair; Ericksen, Ranking Minority Member; Jarrett, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Armstrong, Bailey, Campbell, Clibborn, Cooper, Dickerson, Edwards, Flannigan, Hankins, Hatfield, Hudgins, Kristiansen, Lovick, Mielke, Morris, Nixon, Rodne, Romero, Schindler, Shabro, Sullivan, Wallace, Wood and Woods.

Staff: Page Scott (786-7301).

Background:

Traffic control signals may be designed and operated to respond to certain classes of approaching vehicles, usually emergency or transit vehicles, to give them priority in passing through an intersection. Devices which activate this priority or otherwise preempt the normal traffic signal operations have recently become more available to the general public through significant price reductions and internet purchases.

Current law prohibits persons from unlawfully altering traffic control signals or devices. A violation of these provisions is, at a maximum, a misdemeanor.

Current law presently addresses unauthorized use of optical strobe light devices. Optical strobe light devices emit optical signals at specific frequencies to traffic control signals in order to alter the cycle of the lights. Optical strobe light devices may only be installed or used on the following classes of vehicles: (1) law enforcement or emergency vehicles (to obtain the right of way at intersections); (2) Department of Transportation, city, or county maintenance vehicles (to perform maintenance tests); or (3) public transit vehicles (to accelerate the cycle of the lights). A violation of these provisions is a traffic infraction.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Traffic control signal preemption devices are defined as a device that interferes with or alters the operation of a traffic control signal.

Owning or using a traffic control signal preemption device is unlawful except for:

1. Owners or operators of authorized emergency vehicles for use in providing emergency services;
2. Owners or operators of state or local maintenance vehicles for use in performing signal tests or maintenance;
3. Owners or operators of municipal transit vehicles for use in providing transit services; or
4. Manufacturers or retailers in the course of doing business with an authorized individual or agency.

Selling a traffic control signal preemption device to someone other than those listed as being authorized is illegal. Violations are classified as gross misdemeanors.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: These devices have become more affordable to average citizens and are readily available for sale on the internet. This bill provides a simple, cost effective way to combat the potential chaos these devices can create. Outlawing the use of these devices is needed for the effective operation of the transportation system and to preserve the safety of the traveling public.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Wallace, prime sponsor; and Toby Rickman, Department of Transportation.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.